



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

19th District News

June 2003



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Dear Friends:

Thank you for your interest and participation in the Washington State Legislature.

In this edition of *19th District News*, we cover the major issues this session — including the recently approved operating, transportation and construction budgets.

We also review topics that haven't received as much media attention but that we believe are equally important — including commercial-fishing policy, flood-control decisions, economic-development work and insurance-consumer protection.

We're proud to serve the communities of Southwest and coastal Washington. We are committed to providing fair and balanced representation — placing the interests of working families first.

Don't hesitate to call or write whenever you have something to say about what's going on in your state government. Your comments help us do a better job!

Best wishes,

Brian Hatfield
State Representative
19th Legislative District

Brian Blake
State Representative
19th Legislative District

◆ Budgets:

Two-year plan limits taxes, while preserving basic services

The focus of the recent special session was the operating budget, one of the three major budgets we write every two years. (The others are the transportation budget and the construction – or capital – budget.)

We faced tough choices and no easy answers in solving the \$2.7-billion deficit. **For example, here are some real-world programs and services into which the revenue shortfall can be translated:**

- **If we shut down every public college and university — we'd save \$2.9 billion.**
- **If we stopped providing medical assistance for elderly citizens, disabled citizens, and needy families — we'd save \$2.7 billion.**
- **If we closed all the prisons and stopped funding long-term care for elderly citizens and disabled citizens — we'd save \$2.5 billion.**

Most people agree that the Legislature must find a balance. We must ensure quality, dependable public education, health and safety — and trigger lasting economic recovery that keeps people and businesses working. The two of us constantly remind our colleagues that these two objectives don't have to be mutually exclusive!

◆ The goal: Protect children, as well as elderly and vulnerable

We knew from the beginning – before we set off to write the operating budget – that spending cuts would hit every area of state service. No program would go untouched.

In addressing these budget challenges, however, we refused to exploit people who don't have a vote. We refused to withhold a decent level of support, either for children's programs or for services for senior citizens and other adults who can't fend for themselves.

The compromise to which we agreed in the special session maintains the Children's Health Insurance Program as well as Medicaid eligibility for children.

In education, we funded the president's No Child Left Behind Act, as well as class-size reduction in the 2004-2005 school year.



A strong, basic education is the right of every Washington child.

The new budget also maintains the "Ticket to Work" program allowing working disabled people to purchase Medicaid coverage.

But make no mistake: This Legislature said that government efficiency must be the rule. People have a right to know their tax dollars are spent wisely. State agencies must perform at a high standard — and be held accountable if they don't.

◆ Transportation: Get our state's economy moving again

Before we did anything else this session, we approved a bipartisan measure calling for rigorous performance audits of transportation programs.

The new policy reflects a fundamental emphasis on efficiency and accountability. This audit plan reflects our commitment to get the most of every tax dollar invested in transportation programs. We believe performance audits are needed to increase citizen confidence.

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Specific regional transportation projects funded by the new transportation budget include:

- Construction of the Lexington Bridge in Cowlitz County.
- Seismic work on U.S. Highway 101 over the Chehalis River bridge.
- Paving for State Route 107 from the Chehalis River to State Route 12.
- Paving for State Route 4 from Skamokawa to Interstate 5.
- Realignment of Svensen's curve on State Route 4.
- Paving for State Route 6 and U.S. Highway 101 to Pe Ell.



The Lexington Bridge is a key part of the new transportation budget.

The bipartisan transportation plan reflects many recommendations from the Washington Competitiveness Council — a group of businesses and other citizens who developed a plan to get Washington on the road to recovery.

◆ Construction: Invest in our future

Some of the capital-budget projects in our region include:

- **The Ilwaco Heritage Foundation** — Renovate main museum interior.
- **Grayland Beach** — Develop campground.
- **South Beach area** — Level and raise campsites and road above flood level.
- **Grays Harbor College** — Design lab/classroom facility that (1) accommodates increasing enrollment and provides accredited science programs to meet industry and marketplace demands, and (2) centralizes chemistry, physics, geology, life and health sciences programs.
- **Lower Columbia College** — Design fine arts building to replace the 40-year-old existing structure.
- **Fort Canby** — Replace the dilapidated concession store and inadequate park office at the entrance.
- Renovate Colbert House, including repair or replacement of deteriorated porch elements.
- Repair porch-roof drainage, rehabilitate deteriorated windows, and prepare needed cyclical-maintenance plan.
- Partial funding to restore North Head Lighthouse.
- **Willapa Harbor Skate Park** — HUGS Foundation project.

◆ Public-works projects: key services in our communities

A public-works proposal we approved early this year will help bolster the economy in our region. For example, the legislation helps fund a reservoir upgrade planned by Cowlitz County Public Utility District No. 1.

We believe that public-works projects such as this provide a solid local infrastructure and create good-paying jobs.

In addition, businesses scrutinize a community's infrastructure when they're deciding whether to expand old operations or to start new ones.



We must protect our families and communities that rely on commercial fishing.

◆ Fishing:

Three bills OK'd to bolster one of our essential industries

It's great to talk about three big ones that didn't get away this year — in this case, a trio of legislative proposals aimed at bolstering commercial fishing.

Commercial fishing is critical to so many families in our region. But as we all know too well, federal restrictions have taken a toll on the viability of our fishing economy.

◆ Defending careers from excessive punishment

One of our bills protects commercial fishers from livelihood-threatening punishment for relatively small fishing infractions.

A license-suspension-review committee will be set up to review allegations that a commercial fisher has committed a violation. The Department of Fish & Wildlife is required to consider the committee's opinion in its review of the allegations.

This bill gives the department discretion to suspend commercial-fishing privileges upon conviction of two or more "qualifying commercial fishing violations" in a three-year period. But the suspension may not exceed a year.

We saw the need for this legislation as a result of a situation where a person could lose all their licenses, and basically lose their whole livelihood, if they committed a single violation. This bill gives the department an enforcement mechanism that won't take away people's ability to earn a living.

◆ Direct Retail Endorsement

We advanced a second fishing measure expanding the Direct Retail Endorsement program.

This will give commercial fishers an opportunity to sell sturgeon — along with salmon and crab — directly to retail shoppers and restaurants.

◆ Better tracking to protect public health

A third "catch" this session is a measure that grants the Department of Fish & Wildlife the authority to track fish and shellfish sales. The goal is to make sure the fish being sold isn't from contaminated areas.

The department will now be able to enforce shellfish-closure areas much more effectively. Further, the new policy will enable the department to do a better job keeping an eye on potential poachers — scofflaws who can have a disastrous impact on recreational as well as commercial fishing. Before this new policy, poachers had a pretty easy time finding a market for their catch — and that means illegal competition for lawful fishers.

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◆ Local control:

Neighborhoods have the right to make their own flood decisions

As a general rule, we tend to look at every issue from the perspective of “local control.” What does it mean for real people — and how can real families and real neighborhoods use it to make their lives better?

We won support for a bill directing that a community in a flood-control-zone district can elect its own board of supervisors. Previous state policy directed that these boards had to be made up of *county* officials. But any given county’s governing body may or may not include people who live in the county’s flood-prone community.

Flooding problems caused by silt in the Mt. St. Helens blast area make these flood-control districts extremely important in this decision-making process. Certainly, the Lexington area north of Kelso in Cowlitz County is a perfect example.

It just seems to us that people who live in an area hit by flooding are in the best position to make decisions about how to deal with it!

They’re the ones who see the dikes and know what the streams are up to. This legislation says that citizens who have to live with flood-control decisions will have more authority in making those decisions.

The bill was requested by constituents from Cowlitz County, including county commissioners and the local flood-control committee. The commissioners and the committee believed that residents will be served better if they can elect their own board of supervisors.

In our opinion, the best decisions come from local people who live in the district, walk the dikes, and know the streams.

Local decisions should be made by local people.

This bill says a **neighborhood** must have the right to elect **neighborhood** people who understand the **neighborhood** and who know its specific concerns. **It doesn’t get any simpler than that.**

◆ State permits:

Streamlining environmental review to shield community jobs

The time and toil of navigating the process of appealing an environmental-permit decision is enough to make a grown person cry — or make a business fold up its tent and go somewhere else.

Going through the process of submitting several permits — and then appealing a denial of one or more of them in a lot of cases — is more than just frustrating. It’s extremely expensive.

This year in Olympia, we backed legislation to give rural economies a boost by trimming the state’s permit-appeals process. Expediting this process will make approval for large-scale projects easier, bringing new businesses and jobs to our rural towns and communities.



Cutting bureaucracy helps create jobs like these and others, without hurting the environment.

Our bill trims four appeals boards down to one to deal strictly with economic-development projects in distressed counties. This will give people a decent chance to get their permits on time and then get on with the work.

The bill was the result of negotiations between citizens and folks representing business groups, the Washington Farm Bureau, the Port of Grays Harbor and other interests.

While the legislation streamlines the appeals process, it doesn’t weaken or undermine any existing environmental policy.

◆ Insurance:

Measure bans practice that is harmful to low-income homebuyers

Have you ever heard of “single-premium credit insurance”? **Chances are good that if you’ve heard of it, you don’t like it.** We convinced our colleagues in the Legislature to prohibit this practice in most cases.

Single-premium credit insurance is very often tied to high-interest loans marketed to low-income citizens. Frequently, a single-premium credit-insurance policy is sold in connection with refinancing a mortgage loan.

Responding to consumer concerns, lending institutions such as Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, Citigroup, and Household Finance have already eliminated the sale of single-premium credit insurance in conjunction with mortgage loans.



Representatives Hatfield and Blake help lead the Coastal Caucus, fighting for common-sense policies that protect our way of life in Southwest and coastal Washington.

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